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ABSTRACT

Actions which state legislators can take to promote the improvement of K-12 public education are presented in this brochure. The brochure is one of a series which offers specific ways in which different interest groups can respond to the eight broad action recommendations proposed by the Education Commission of the States' Task Force on Education for Economic Growth in their report, "Action for Excellence." The following areas are covered by the recommendations: (1) educational improvement plans; (2) partnerships between states and communities; (3) educational resources; (4) teacher improvement and recognition; (5) the student's academic experiences; (6) educational quality assurance; (7) educational leadership and management; and (8) services to students who are unserved or underserved. (DC)

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ACTIONS
FOR
LEGISLATORS

Task Force on Education for Economic Growth

Education Commission of the States

EA015941

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

The challenge facing leaders in every state of the union is to inspire a new generation of citizens to be even more productive and imaginative than the generations who made "American know-how" a standard of excellence around the world. Beyond inspiring them, leaders must ***empower*** them by providing an education system that fosters the necessary skills, imagination and commitment.

Unfortunately, report after report indicates that we have for too long ignored the obvious connection between a well educated work force and a productive, expanding economy. In addition, technological changes over the last two decades are outpacing the schools' capacity to address change. Skills we asked the schools to stress a few short years ago seem inadequate today. And as the demand for highly trained people has risen, the achievement of students — especially in high-demand skills such as analysis or problem-solving — has been declining.

Americans have every right to be proud of an education system like no other in its commitment to serve ***all*** citizens, not just a privileged few. Today many exemplary schools, colleges and universities are graduating students who are as well prepared as any in the world to face the challenges of the future. But our schools must be strengthened, if they are to do what they alone can do: bring about an American renaissance.

We are challenged to act now, each in our own way, to:

- **Establish** clear, compelling and widely agreed upon goals and priorities for improving education
- **Upgrade** our expectations for children and the skills required to meet those expectations
- **Collaborate** as never before — educators, governors, legislators, business and labor leaders and citizens — to strengthen the schools
- **Educate** ***all*** students in the skills essential to economic productivity and to the high quality of life a strong, growing economy can provide.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE?

In December 1982, the Education Commission of the States established a national Task Force on Education for Economic Growth under the leadership of Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. Forty-one distinguished national leaders set these goals for the Task Force:

- Create national understanding of the need for a well educated work force and of the changing skills essential to economic growth
- Promote policies, programs and actions that national, state and local leaders can use to improve education
- Establish partnerships among leaders in communities, business, labor, government and education to improve education in ways that lead to economic growth and a higher quality of life for all Americans.

The Task Force has published ***Action for Excellence,*** a report on the condition of education today and a series of recommendations for leaders throughout the country. The Task Force's eight major recommendations appear below. Following each are some steps leaders can take to reaffirm a national commitment to our children and our economy.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN STATE LEGISLATORS TAKE?

In virtually all states, the legislature is constitutionally charged with providing a system of education for all its citizens. To carry out this responsibility, legislatures enact policy, set priorities and appropriate funds for education; allocate responsibilities and delegate authority to education agencies and boards; and monitor the impact of programs or policies. The following actions may be tailored to meet individual state needs or incorporated into school improvement plans already under way.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop — and put into effect as promptly as possible — plans for improving education in the public schools from kindergarten through grade 12.

- Take a leading role in establishing a state task force on education for economic growth.
- Help develop a state plan for education.
- Study education needs.
- Organize the legislative process to coordinate policies for education and economic growth.
- Recommend programs and policies that reflect local concerns.
- Hold public hearings.
- Fund the state plan and the measures it recommends.
- Assign responsibility for implementing the plan.
- Oversee implementation of the plan.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 2

Create broader and more effective partnerships for improving education in the states and communities of the nation.

- Promote working partnerships among parents, community leaders, management, labor, government, educators and the scientific community to strengthen education:
  — Invite business, labor and industry representatives to work with schools to strengthen curricula, improve student performance, enlarge the supply of good teachers and broaden understanding of the importance of investing in education
  — Fund challenge grants to help support long-range development of education and the economy.
- Establish collaborative programs:
  — Create exchange programs for business and labor leaders and educators
  — Encourage interdisciplinary programs at schools of education, business and public administration
  — Set up reciprocal programs that let teachers intern in private companies and allow business people to serve in the schools.
- Review state laws and regulations to remove obstacles to partnerships:
  — Modify certification requirements to permit qualified people with special expertise (from trades or industry, the professions, or academia) to serve as resources in and out of the classroom.
- Develop fiscal incentives for partnerships:
  — Provide tax credits to firms that let their employees teach special courses or that donate equipment or services to schools
  — Award grants to libraries, science museums, or art museums so institutions like these can make their special facilities available to students.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 3

Marshal the resources which are essential for improving the public schools.

- Consider the requirements of education for economic growth in allocating resources.
- Draw on the best research available before deciding how to allocate resources.
- Define and fund education research and development in critical areas.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 4

Express a new and higher regard for teachers and for the profession of teaching.

- Review current statutes governing the teaching profession -- or require state boards of education to undertake this review.
- Fund training programs for teachers, such as summer institutes or business/education exchange programs.
- Provide grants, scholarships and loan-forgiveness programs for teachers who train in critical academic areas.
- Offer incentives for state and local boards to consider special rewards for outstanding teachers and administrators.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 5

Make the academic experience more intense and more productive.

- Review the statutes and budget decisions that affect the curriculum and the length of the school year; change policy as appropriate.
- Charge the state education agency and school districts to develop programs that reward student achievement. For example:
  — Recognize educational achievement by sponsoring academic rewards and competitions
  — Organize summer institutes or alternative schools where students can develop skills in special areas.
- Charge the state board and the state education agency to establish a committee to study curriculum content and sequence.
- Consider providing matching funds for laboratory equipment and materials.
- Establish programs that let high school students take college courses in, for example, science, mathematics, economics or communications.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 6

Provide quality assurance in education.

- Assure that fundamental issues of performance and quality are adequately addressed
- Study issues of accreditation and rewards for outstanding teachers.
- Fund curriculum development and testing in critical areas like science, mathematics, economics, writing and problem-solving.
- Establish a statewide testing commission to work with school districts to assess student performance, set standards of performance and encourage academic excellence.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 7

Improve leadership and management in the schools.

- Provide a setting (through budgetary action, the delegation of authority or other legislative action) in which the management of instruction can be assessed and changed as necessary.

ACTION RECOMMENDATION 8

Serve better those students who are at present unserved or underserved.

- Evaluate current programs for students with special needs; strengthen or expand programs where appropriate by establishing new policies, supplying new funding or setting new requirements.
- Provide incentives that encourage women, minorities and other students to participate in fields where they are now underrepresented; for example, establish special scholarship programs or "mentor" programs for students.
- Support the broad and equitable distribution of educational resources so that no child is denied the possibility of becoming a productive member of society.

Although the Task Force recommendations are generally consistent with NCSL policy, NCSL has not formally endorsed them.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

The Task Force will continue to be active, promoting efforts to improve K-12 education and developing products that legislators and other concerned groups can use to improve education for economic growth. For more information, contact:

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